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ABSTRACT

Computers have had a tremendous impact on library services as automation has affected every aspect of library activity. Automated systems may be viewed as either internal, intermediate, or external, and different factors must be considered in planning for various types of systems. Internal systems, which are used only by library personnel, handle serials management and acquisitions. The main considerations involved in implementing them are funding for the system and the training of library personnel. Intermediate systems are more visible to the public than internal systems, and include the circulation system and cataloging. Major considerations in implementing this type of system are the same as for internal systems, with such additional factors as patron instruction and system promotion. External systems involve groups from outside the library (e.g., patrons), and include reference services and library collections. Considerations for implementing this type of system involve the same factors as internal and intermediate systems, but also encompass issues of cooperative planning with the library, faculty, and students, because the success of external systems pivots around some form of consensus among the affected parties. (SD)

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LIBRARIES IN TRANSITION: INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

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LIBRARIES IN TRANSITION: INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

As we all know, computers have had a tremendous impact on library services. This, of course, is not news to any of us. Automation has affected every aspect of library activity. From circulation to serials, from cataloging to reference, from journal and book format to the card catalog, automation has touched and affected the development of every library system. Again, as we all know, the planning implementation of these various automated systems requires a great deal of thought and anticipation. But we must realize that planning for an automated serials management system is different from planning for an automated online card catalog. Similarly, planning for an automated acquisitions system is different from planning for an automated reference system. This paper addresses the various and differing concerns surrounding the introduction of computerized systems in libraries. For example, the process of planning for an automated acquisitions system is and should be different from planning for an automated circulation system. Factors involving the decision process are broader and more complex as the automated system progressively affects a wider range of people. As the automated system becomes more visible and usable to groups outside the library, additional planning factors must be considered. These planning factors will, almost always, involve groups outside the library.

Internal Systems and External Systems

The planning for an automated system will depend on the relative impact of the system. The factors which will be considered and anticipated will increase as the groups of users increase. As might be logically assumed, the systems which would affect the least number of people in the academic community would be the systems involving technical services. Accordingly, the systems which would affect the largest groups of people would be systems involving public services. However, these classifications, technical and public services,are too simplistic. The distinction between technical and public services is not clearly defined. In planning for automated systems, internal and external classifications may be more appropriate. It is also important to note that systems are not exclusively internal or exclusively external. There is a progression from systems that are primarily internal through to systems that are primarily external.

Internal Systems

Systems which are primarily internal are serials management and acquisitions. While the efforts and results of these departments affect all library patrons, the introduced automated systems themselves do not have a direct impact on library patrons. Only library employees will use these automated systems. Only library employees will need to be trained in the use of these systems. Therefore, the two primary considerations or factors involved in implementing internal systems are, (1) funding, and (2) training library employees. Excluding the budget process and funding

for the automated system, no group outside the library would have a direct impact on the decision process to automate the serials management or acquisitions systems. Students, faculty, or administration would have no direct exposure or experience with these systems. Therefore, their concerns need not be directly addressed in the process of selecting an automated serials management or acquisitions systems. In summary, the two major factors involving the planning process for internal systems such as serials management and acquisitions are funding and library employee training.

Intermediate Systems

Examples of systems which begin to emerge from the internal workings of the library and begin to more directly affect a wider range of people are the circulation system and the card catalog. These functions may be classified as intermediate systems. These systems have characteristics of both technical and public services activities. Obviously, both of these systems must run efficiently if the library is to maintain bibliographic control of its collection. Cataloging and the card catalog itself have long been major fixtures in traditional technical services operations. However, it is also obvious that the public has exposure to these systems. These systems, and changes involving these systems, are more visible to the public. Because of this exposure, additional factors must be considered during the planning process for automated circulation systems or automated card catalogs.

Of course, the two factors which were considered during the planning process for primarily internal systems are also planning factors for intermediate systems. That is, funding and library employee training must be part of the planning process. But because intermediate systems affect wider groups of people, other factors must be considered. Perhaps the most obvious additional planning factor is patron instruction. The people who use the library must be taught how to use the automated card catalog and how to check out a book involving an automated circulation system. An additional factor beyond actual patron instruction is the correct presentation and promotion of these systems. Part of the patron population may resist the change from manual to automated systems. It is important for the library to be aware of potential problems when planning for an automated intermediate system. The library must point out the rationale behind the decision to automate. The library must document the advantages of the new systems. Most importantly, these advantages must outweigh the disadvantages caused by the change from the familar to the new. In summary, the factors involving the planning process for intermediate systems are funding, library employee training, patron instruction, and system promotion.

External Systems

Examples of external systems are reference services and library collection format. This catagory most closely resembles the traditional public service and public access operations of the library. While libraries have had access

to online reference sources for two decades, libraries as a whole have shied away from the difficult yet logical transition to complete automation of their reference services. For example, most libraries have access to online bibliographic databases but also continue to maintain the printed copy of the index. By contrast, most libraries which have automated serials, acquisitions, circulation, or card catalog systems, do not maintain an active parallel non-automated corresponding system. For example, most libraries who have an automated card catalog do not maintain a current, public traditional card catalog. New systems usually replace older systems. This is apparently not true, as of yet, in reference services. I believe this is true, in part, because the factors involved in the decision process affect too many people and the effects are too controversial for the library and the institution itself. One institutional issue is accreditation. If the library would cancel a number of printed indexes, how would the institutions accreditation be affected? Would online access be considered equally with printed access? Another important issue to consider is the impact this transition would have on library use and instruction. As the medium and access involving reference sources shifts, library use patterns would certainly change. Obviously, there are many questions, issues, and factors involved in automating external systems such as reference services.

The second example I cited as an external system is collection format. Library collections exist, of course, in a number of formats including printed volumes, microforms, CD-ROM, online, etc. Increasing numbers of journals and books are available either online or on CD-ROM. Given the real limits

on budget and library shelving space in most libraries and institutions, certain materials could be attractive candidates for CD-ROM or online formating. An institution could significantly reduce materials budgets and shelving and space needs if certain books and journals could be made available in only CD-ROM or online formats. The issues, questions, and factors surrounding the cancellation of print journals are similar to those surrounding the cancellation of printed indexes. Once again, accreditation is an institutional issue which cannot be overlooked. Another factor is patron use. Some patrons simply enjoy picking up the latest issue of their favorite journal and browsing the entire issue. This sort of familarity may be hampered if the library shifts to automated format.

In summary, the factors involved in planning for automated external systems originate or involve, to a great extent, from groups outside the library. Of course, the factors invovled in planning for internal and intermediate systems are also pertinent factors to be considered in planning for external systems as well. Factors such as funding and library employee training are certainly still present. Patron instruction and system promotion are also important. But unique to external systems are the institutional issues. Institutional issues cannot be addressed by the library alone. The library, faculty, students, and university administration must cooperate and plan together. The success of automated external systems will depend to a great extent, on the parties involved in the decision process. Without some form of concensus among the affected parties, the automation process may be difficult.